

The Republican Party's Glaring Mismanagement

Well, Mr. Speaker, how badly have our Republican friends mismanaged the appropriations process?

Let's look at the facts.

It is now October 21st, 21 days since the start of fiscal 2004, and this Congress has passed and President Bush has signed only three of the 13 annual spending bills into law – Defense, Homeland Security, and the Legislative Branch.

You will notice that the Military Construction bill – one of the least controversial bills considered by this house every single year – is still mired in conference.

If that is not indicative of this Republican Congress's mismanagement, then I do not know what is.

The fact of the matter is, since the Republican Party regained the House Majority, this Congress has had to pass an omnibus appropriations bill in seven out of nine years.

That's right. In only two years since consideration of the fiscal 1996 spending bills did this Congress pass stand-alone legislation for all 13 appropriations bills – in fiscal 1998 and fiscal 2002.

By comparison, please note that for fiscal 1994 and fiscal 1995 – when Democrats controlled both chambers of this Congress – we passed every single spending bill as stand-alone legislation.

So, Mr. Speaker, the members on our side of the aisle can hardly wait to hear what excuse our Republican colleagues have cooked up for failing to complete our appropriations work on time.

You certainly can't blame Tom Daschle and Senate Democrats like you did last year – at least not with any credibility.

The last time I checked, my Republican friends, there was a Republican majority in this body, a Republican majority in the other body, and a Republican chief executive at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue.

So what is your excuse this year?

We all know the truth: this mismanaged appropriations process is the direct result of your inability to compromise even with members of your own party.

And it's an affliction that is not just holding up the appropriations process.

It's also preventing us from passing an energy bill, from extending the child tax credit to 6.5 million working American families, and from giving our seniors a real prescription drug benefit that is not designed to destroy Medicare.

The truth is, we have not completed our work on time.

And the GOP has no one to blame this year for this legislative failure but itself.

NEWS FROM U.S.REP. MARTIN FROST

Texas' 24th District • Ranking Member, House Committee on Rules

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Statement of U.S. Rep. Martin Frost on the Shell “CR”:

House GOP Ignores Victims of Bush Economy, Hides Budget Disaster

‘If the Republican Party wants this Republican government to raise the “debt tax” on Americans...then they should at least have the courage to be honest with the public about it’

WASHINGTON – U.S. Rep. Martin Frost, the top Democrat on the House Committee on Rules, made the following Floor statement today on the rule for H.J.Res. 73, a “continuing resolution” that Republicans will use to carry all the appropriations bills they have failed to pass this year.

“The new deficit numbers came out yesterday and they confirmed what we already know: This Republican government has given America the biggest budget deficit in our history – nearly \$400 BILLION dollars in FY03, plus an additional \$500 BILLION dollar deficit in FY04, according to the Bush Administration.

“Mark my words, these Republican deficits will end raising your taxes – and worse, raising your children’s taxes. And Republican leaders are going to do everything in their power to hide their abominable record of fiscal mismanagement.

“Just listen to the Bush Administration’s Treasury Secretary in today’s New York Times. He predicts that this jobless recovery will somehow magically add 2 million new jobs before next year’s elections. He’s saying that this economy – which has lost nearly 3 million jobs since President Bush took office, the worst jobs record since Herbert Hoover and the Great Depression – is now going to create 200,000 new jobs a month.

“Perhaps the Bush Administration still believes in Santa Claus, and perhaps they really believe that 2 million jobs will magically appear under the election Christmas tree next year. But the American people know a snow job when they see one.

“And make no mistake, M. Speaker, they’re seeing one today on the House Floor. This so-called ‘continuing resolution’ is a procedural shell game to hide Republican mismanagement of the government. This is not trick or treat, just tricks.

“This entire process today makes clear that this is a Republican government that refuses to do its job – at the same time that too many hardworking Americans are still suffering from the Republican recession. While millions can’t find any jobs, Republicans refuse to do the jobs that they have – and that taxpayers’ pay them to do.

“As my Republican friend on the Rules Committee, Mr. Goss of Florida, once said about a continuing resolution, ‘Congress is failing to fulfill its obligations in a timely and responsible way, choosing to fall-back on one CR after another instead of putting in the time to do our jobs.’ Or, as he said another time, a continuing resolution ‘erodes the credibility of the Congress.’

“Well, after misleading the American public for so long, neither this Republican Congress nor this Republican Administration has much credibility to erode anymore. And as for ‘putting in the time to do our jobs,’ this Republican Congress hardly even bothers anymore. The House hasn’t put in a full week’s worth of work in months. And this week, we’re not even going to be here for 24 hours.

“It’s gotten so bad that this resolution is the only so-called substantive legislation before the House this week, and everyone knows that it won’t actually do anything. It’s just a procedural shell that they will use to hide from taxpayers the massive ‘omnibus’ spending bill they’re going to sneak through later this year. And mark my

words, when this resolution comes back to the House in its massive and bloated form, you won't even recognize it.

"Now, my friends in the majority will tell you that the House did its work. They will tell you that the other body caused the problem they are addressing today with this shell game. They want Americans to forget one simple truth: The Republican Party controls the Senate just like it controls the House – just like it controls the White House and the entire executive branch.

"And Republicans refuse to use that power for the people still suffering from the 2nd Bush recession – and the 3rd Republican recession in the past 20 years. For example, some 1.4 million Americans have been unemployed so long in this economy that they've exhausted their unemployment insurance. After the end of this year, Americans who lose their jobs – people like the nearly 3 million jobs lost since President Bush took office – won't be able to enroll in unemployment insurance. But Republicans refuse to help them before this Congress closes up shop for the year.

"Now, some will say that Republicans are simply incompetent. That they can't figure out how to run the government. That would be bad enough, but I don't think it gives the Republican Party the credit it deserves. Because this Republican government can be ruthlessly effective when its priorities are involved. Unfortunately for the American people, the priorities of this Republican government are largely limited to the political priorities of the Republican Party.

"Republican leaders have proven their willingness to use their power over the government to get more power for the Republican Party. As the *Washington Post* suggested last week, Republicans are creating an almost Soviet-style system. They treat the people's government as just another arm of the Republican Party.

"Republican leaders have moved heaven and earth to protect big corporate tax-dodgers, but they won't give military and working families the same child tax credit that they gave to the wealthiest.

"Just last week, House Republican leaders twisted enough arms to block a Democratic pay raise for the military – which would have given soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan a \$1500 bonus – but they can't be bothered to do anything about high health care costs.

:And earlier this year, Tom DeLay's office used federal resources to track down his legislative opposition in Texas – and even urged the FBI to arrest the Democratic state legislators who dared to stand up to him. But now, House Republican leaders won't use the federal resources of the Congress to help the millions of Americans who need unemployment insurance in the midst of President Bush's jobless recovery.

"This is not a government of the people, by the people and for the people. It's a government of the Republican Party, by the Republican Party and for the Republican Party.

"And if the Republican Party wants this Republican government to raise the "debt tax" on Americans – while at the same time shortchanging education and veterans' health care – then they should at least have the courage to be honest with the public about it.

"So I urge my colleagues to oppose this rule. Don't help Republican leaders keep Americans in the dark this year.

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Office of Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi

VOTE YES ON THE BROWN (D-OH) MOTION TO INSTRUCT CONFEREES ON THE MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG BILL

Insist That Conferees Drop The House-Passed Provisions Turning Medicare into A Voucher Program in 2010

Later today, Rep. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) will offer a motion to instruct conferees on H.R. 1, the Medicare Prescription Drug bill. Democratic Members are encouraged to speak during the debate on the Brown motion today and to vote YES on the motion when it is voted on next week. The Brown motion would instruct conferees to reject the House-passed privatization (“premium support”) provisions turning Medicare into a voucher in 2010.

Following are talking points on the Brown motion to instruct.

- ! Premium Support Provisions Would Turn Medicare Into A Voucher in 2010.** The House bill contains privatization (“premium support”) provisions that would turn Medicare into a voucher program – rather than a defined benefit program – in 2010, causing premiums to rise substantially for those wanting to stay in traditional Medicare. Indeed, the Chief Actuary of Medicare estimates that premiums could rise by up to 25% under the “premium support” provisions. By requiring beneficiaries to pay much more to stay in traditional Medicare, these premium support provisions would have the effect of forcing many beneficiaries to join HMOs and other private plans – since they could no longer afford to stay in traditional Medicare.
- ! Indeed, The Premium Support Provisions Were Explicitly Written to Privatize Medicare.** The premium support provisions, written by Chairman Bill Thomas, were specifically designed to privatize the entire Medicare program. Indeed, on June 25, Chairman Thomas stated exactly that: “To those who say that [the House GOP bill] would end Medicare as we know it, our answer is: We certainly hope so.”
- ! Seniors’ Organizations Strongly Oppose The Premium Support Provisions.** Seniors’ organizations strongly oppose the House-passed premium support provisions. For example, AARP has stated, “The provision that would establish a premium support structure beginning in 2010 could destabilize the traditional Medicare program and lead to much higher costs to beneficiaries. ... Rather than expand choice, this provision could limit choice by leading to substantially higher costs for beneficiaries who want to stay in the traditional Medicare program.” The National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare has

stated, “We are strongly opposed to provisions in the House legislation that would require Medicare to compete against private plans, based on price, beginning in 2010. This requirement would transform Medicare from a defined benefit to a defined contribution program and ultimately result in the dismantling of Medicare as a universal entitlement.” Similarly, the Alliance for Retired Americans has stated, “The Alliance for Retired Americans opposes any effort to privatize Medicare, and the House plan does just that. Under this plan, in 2010, Medicare would become a private voucher system.”

! Finally, The Premium Support Provisions Would Have A Particularly Severe Impact on Rural Beneficiaries. As was explained above, under the GOP premium support provisions, millions of beneficiaries who want to stay in traditional Medicare could be required to pay much more than they do now. This would be particularly true for beneficiaries living in rural areas. Since there are fewer beneficiaries in rural areas and they tend to be older and sicker, premiums for traditional Medicare in rural areas would increase particularly dramatically, under the GOP “premium support” provisions. Hence, under the House GOP plan, seniors and disabled Americans in rural areas would have only two choices – stay in traditional Medicare and pay much more out of their own pockets, or join an HMO or other private health plan and thereby give up the choice of doctors they rely on. Furthermore, HMOs and other private plans have had a very poor record of serving seniors in rural areas. Indeed, according to the government’s own advisory board, the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission, only 19 percent of rural Medicare beneficiaries have the option of enrolling in a Medicare managed care plan in 2003. That contrasts with 74 percent of Medicare beneficiaries living in urban areas with an HMO option. In addition, when HMOs do serve rural areas, they tend to be unreliable. For example, in 2002, 90 percent of Medicare beneficiaries in Arkansas were dropped by their HMO.



Office of Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi

VOTE YES ON THE WOOLSEY MOTION TO INSTRUCT CONFEREES ON CHILD TAX CREDIT BILL

Today, Rep. Lynn Woolsey (D-CA) will offer a motion to instruct conferees on H.R. 1308, the Child Tax Credit bill. Democratic Members are encouraged to speak during the debate on the Woolsey motion today and vote YES on the motion when it is voted on next week. The Woolsey motion instructs conferees to accept the bipartisan Senate-passed child tax credit bill and get the bill done.

With new data showing that incomes are down and poverty is up, Democrats are continuing to fight for passage of the expanded child tax credit to help 6.5 million working and military families. In July, the checks for the child tax credit provided in the new law were sent out. However, 6.5 million families got no check or a smaller check because House Republicans, led by Tom DeLay, are stalling passage of the Senate bill. It is time for President Bush to demonstrate leadership and insist that Majority Leader Tom DeLay and House Republicans enact tax relief for these working and military families now.

Following are talking points on the Woolsey motion to instruct.

Democrats Are Fighting to Enhance the Child Tax Credit. House Democrats are fighting to quickly enact the bipartisan Senate-passed tax bill to help the 12 million children that Republicans left behind in the new tax law. Nearly three months ago, on June 5, the Senate overwhelmingly passed a measure (H.R. 1308), 94 to 2, to immediately give an increased child tax credit to 6.5 million working families, including the families of 262,000 military children – families earning \$10,500 to \$26,625 that Republicans deliberately left out of their \$350 billion tax law. But House Republicans, instead of immediately passing the Senate measure, passed an \$80 billion political ploy to solve the \$3.5 billion problem of providing tax relief for these children of working and military families. As the *Washington Post* said, “But the House, where the leaders are hostile to tax credits for those who do not pay income taxes, used the opening as an excuse to pass another huge tax cut, knowing full well the Senate would never go along.” (*Washington Post*, 7/24/03)

For the First Time in a Decade, Poverty is Up and Median Household Income is Down for Two Consecutive Years. It is clear that more middle-income families are financially-pressed, and more families are falling into poverty as a result of our struggling economy. New Census data recently released shows that the U.S. poverty rate grew from 11.7 percent in 2001 to 12.1 percent in 2002 – with an additional 1.7 million people living in poverty. Further, median household income dropped by 1.1 percent for a second consecutive year. This marks the first time in a decade that income has dropped and poverty has increased 2 years in a row. It is an outrage that Republicans continue to block the child tax credit for

the 6.5 million working families – now for the fourth month, given the economic difficulties that America's families are facing.

House Went on Vacation without Giving These Hard-working Families A Break. In July, the Treasury Department sent out millions of checks for the expanded child tax credit provided in the new law, just as the House adjourned for August vacation. However, the 6.5 million hard working and military families to be helped by the Senate bill got no check or a smaller check because House GOP opposition. It is time for House Republicans to right this wrong, stop playing politics, and pass the Senate provisions.

House Republicans Are Bogging This Tax Relief Down. House Republicans have made it clear that they do not value these working and military families, and that there is no urgency in getting this tax relief done. Rep. Bill Thomas, the chief House tax writer, said "There are worse things than it [the child tax credit bill] not happening." (*Wall Street Journal*, 6/13/03) Regarding the Senate-passed bill, Majority Leader DeLay said, "Ain't going to happen." (*AP*, 6/10/03) And Speaker Hastert said, responding to a question about why not just take care of these families, "Because, first of all, they don't pay taxes..." (*Meet the Press*, 7/20/03) And earlier this month, Roll Call reported that Republicans said the bill it was "all but dead," as Rep. Bill Thomas was unwilling to work out the differences with the Senate. (*Roll Call*, 9/10/03) In fact, House Republicans have voted 22 times against the Senate child tax credit bill, and the conferees have not even met on the measure.

House GOP Bill Leaves Out Help Military Families in Iraq. There are 262,000 children of military families denied the expanded child tax credit because House Republicans are blocking passage of the Senate bill. Further, the House GOP bill contains bad news for the children of the 200,000 men and women serving in Iraq or other combat zones. It leaves in place current law – under which families will have tax increases because combat pay is not counted for purposes of the child tax credit. For example, an E-5 sergeant with 6 years of service and 2 children is paid \$29,000 a year. Generally both of his children would be entitled to the full \$1,000 tax credit; but if he goes to combat for 6 months his credit would drop to \$450 under the House bill. The Senate bill helps these military families, the House bill does not. Not only are they blocking these provisions for our military men and women, but House Republicans have held up since last year the Senate-passed H.R. 1307, the Armed Services Tax Fairness Act, providing \$835 million over ten years in tax relief for men and women serving America, as they oppose Senate provisions in that measure cracking down on those who renounce their citizenship in order to avoid U.S. taxes.

President Bush Must Demonstrate Leadership and Insist that House Republicans and Majority Leader Tom DeLay Enact This Tax Relief Now. At the end of July, after House members left on vacation, the President called on lawmakers to break the impasse and accept the Senate measure, saying, "They [House and Senate members have] got to resolve their differences and get it to my desk as quickly as possible so people can get additional help." (*AP*, 7/24/03) In Michigan, he said, "The child credit must be given to low-income Americans as well. I want the benefits of tax relief all across the spectrum of our society." (*Washington Post*, 7/25/03) As the *New York Times* said, "Only the President has the clout to engineer a true, less costly solution...There are 12 million deserving children in poor families that are far more likely than the affluent to immediately spend the money in the economic stimulus Mr. Bush has been promising." (*New York Times*, 7/24/03) It is time for the President to impose some compassionate conservatism on House Republicans for the sake of these hard working and military families and our

economy.

Senate Bill Will Strengthen the Economy. Democrats know that by putting money in the hands of all hard working Americans can we create jobs and build a strong economy. If we're going to cut taxes to stimulate the economy, let's make sure everybody benefits. The refundable child tax credit is a simple, affordable solution to put money back into these families' pockets so that they can buy the blue jeans, tennis shoes, and the school supplies they need. The added benefit was that additional consumer spending will help to bolster our economy during these tough times.

House Republicans Should Not Saddle our Children with Even More Debt. House Republicans are exploiting the child tax credit provision to pass even more tax cuts that will saddle our children with mountains of debt. The House GOP bill cost more than \$80 billion, while all that is needed to make sure these children and their families are treated fairly like everyone else is \$3.5 billion, and that is fully offset in the Senate bill. It is particularly reckless and irresponsible to do so knowing that this year's federal deficit will hit a record \$401 billion, and climb even further in 2004. These record GOP deficits mean families will be saddled with a debt tax averaging \$4,579 per family of four in 2011 just to pay interest on the public debt. If Congress is going to saddle these hard-working families with debt, they should not be excluded from the expansion of the child tax credit.

Children's Defense Fund States that Hundreds of Thousands of Children of Teachers, Nurses, and Farmers are Left Behind. Of the 12 million children left behind, 178,000 are children in farming families; 567,000 are children of nurses or orderlies; and 337,000 are children of teachers. It also disproportionately leaves behind black and Hispanic children – 2.4 million black children and 4.1 million Hispanic children.



Office of Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi

VOTE YES ON MARKEY MOTION TO INSTRUCT CONFEREES ON THE ENERGY POLICY ACT OF 2003

Don't Let Conferees Weaken Anti-Terrorism Protections At Nuclear Plants

Today, Rep. Ed Markey (D-MA) will offer a motion to instruct conferees on H.R. 6, the Energy Policy Act of 2003. Democratic Members are encouraged to speak during the debate on the Markey motion today and to vote YES on the motion when it is voted on next week. Republican conferees are working behind closed doors to weaken provisions passed by the House to better secure our nation's 103 nuclear power plants. Therefore, the Markey motion would instruct conferees to insist on House-passed provisions to upgrade security at nuclear power plants and improve the transportation of nuclear materials within the United States.

The Markey Motion

Specifically, the Markey motion does the following:

- ! Insists That Conferees Retain the House-Passed Provisions That Strengthen Nuclear Plant Security Procedures.** The House bill requires the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to issue regulations to ensure that nuclear facilities address the threat of nuclear sabotage or a terrorist attack. Republican conferees have weakened this requirement to simply allow the NRC to make any revision it feels is sufficient, based on classified orders that the Commission produced behind closed doors with the nuclear industry. This gives the NRC a green light to merely consider the interim orders it has adopted after 9/11 as adequate and take no further action. More importantly, it ignores bipartisan congressional concern that not enough has been done to strengthen protections at nuclear power plants. The possibility of suicidal terrorist attacks in multiple waves, with large truck bombs or other modern weapons or devices, is too real for our government to ignore.
- ! Insists That The NRC Consult with the Department of Homeland Security on Whether the Location or Design of a Nuclear Plant Is Sufficient to Protect the Public Against A Terrorist Attack.** Republican conferees have eliminated the House requirement that such consultation take place before a nuclear plant can receive liability insurance waivers under the Price Anderson Act. Conferees also eliminated the House requirement for consultation with the Homeland Security Department on whether the *emergency evacuation plans* are sufficient to protect the public. And they also may be eliminating the requirement for consultation with the Homeland Security Department before an existing

power plant is relicensed. Consultation is meaningless without this provision since no new nuclear plants are expected to come on line for at least a decade.

- ! **Insists on the House Position Regarding Nuclear Material Transportation Requirements.** The House bill requires the NRC to set up a more secure system for the transportation of nuclear materials into, and out of the country, as well as within the country. Republican conferees have removed the requirement for the system to better protect transportation *within* the country. In 2002, the NRC testified that there are 2 million radioactive sources in the U.S., and that each year approximately 300 are reported as lost, stolen or abandoned materials. Over the past 5 years, there have been 1,495 reports of lost materials, only half (56%) of which have been found. According to the NRC, a very small amount of radioactive material could spread low-level contamination over several city blocks. It is irresponsible to not ensure that domestic transfers of radioactive materials - as well as imports and exports - are subject to heightened security requirements.

Talking Points on the Markey Motion

The following are talking points on why Democrats should vote for the Markey motion.

- ! **Republicans Are Bowing to Lobbying by Nuclear Utility Industry.** Instead of working to improve security against the threat of terrorism at our most sensitive nuclear power plants, Republican conferees have bowed to the nuclear utility industry's long-standing opposition to stronger anti-terrorism security procedures. The new draft by the conferees would weaken national security by deleting House-passed language that requires a new rule on the transportation of nuclear materials within the country, and weakens House-passed language that requires an NRC rulemaking to upgrade nuclear security at nuclear power plants.
- ! **It Is Astonishing That Conferees Are Retreating From House-Passed Provisions to Enhance Security of Nuclear Facilities.** It is truly astonishing that the conferees are retreating from the clear, consistent position of the House that procedures and systems of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) must be improved to protect the health and safety of the American people. The House has voted twice (H.R. 6 this year, and H.R. 2983, the Price-Anderson Reauthorization bill, last Congress) to require the NRC to take these specific steps to strengthen anti-terrorist protections at nuclear power plants.
- ! **The Conferees' Position Is Particularly Astonishing Since Nuclear Power Plants Remain Key Al Qaeda Targets.** The security of nuclear power plants is critically important to our national security since they remain at the top of the list of Al Qaeda targets. Just two years ago, in his State of the Union speech, President Bush warned that blueprints for nuclear power plants had been found in the caves of Afghanistan. At that time, President Bush warned, "*Our discoveries in Afghanistan confirmed our worst fears, and showed us the true scope of the task ahead. We have seen the depth of our enemies' hatred in videos, where they laugh about the loss of innocent life. And the depth of their hatred is equalled by the madness of the destruction they design.*" Despite the President's warnings, the Republican energy conferees have now decided to weaken nuclear security legislation previously adopted by the House.



Office of Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi

October 21, 2003

VOTE YES ON OBEY MOTION TO INSTRUCT CONFEREES ON IRAQ SUPPLEMENTAL

While all Democrats support our troops serving in Iraq, and want to be sure they receive the equipment they need, we also recognize that we have real needs here at home. Congress must now begin to address the priorities of middle-class Americans: jobs, health care, retirement, our children's education, and the pensions and health care of our veterans.

Today, in recognition of the unmet needs here at home, Rep. Obey will offer a motion to instruct conferees on the Iraq Supplemental that calls for the bipartisan, balanced approach adopted in the Senate – which protects the American taxpayer by providing that half of the Iraqi reconstruction funds will be grants and half will be loans – and calls for Senate-passed provisions addressing the crisis in veterans' health care.

Specifically, the Obey motion instructs conferees to:

- ! Agree to the Senate-passed provision that converts half of the Administration's \$20.3 billion request for Iraqi reconstruction into a loan (unless 90% of Iraq's bilateral debts are forgiven by its creditors);
- ! Agree to the Senate-passed provision that provides \$1.3 billion in emergency funding for VA medical care; and
- ! Agree to Senate-passed provisions dealing with quality-of-life measures for our troops – specifically providing medical and dental screening for the National Guard and Reserve prior to mobilization and extending transitional health care benefits for the National Guard and Reserve from 60 days to 180 days following completion of active duty.

Democratic Members are urged to vote YES on the Obey motion to instruct. Following are talking points on the Obey motion.

- ! **Providing Half of Iraqi Reconstruction Funds as Grants and Half as Loans Is A Balanced Approach, Protecting the American Taxpayer.** The Obey motion instructs the conferees to agree to the provision in the Senate-passed bill that converts half of the \$20.3 billion request for Iraqi reconstruction into a loan. (This provision was a Bayh/Nelson amendment adopted by the

Senate by a vote of 51 to 47 on October 16.) Democrats fully recognize that the U.S. must play a vital role in helping to create a stable and secure Iraq; in helping to restart the Iraqi economy and rebuild Iraqi civil society. That is why the Senate provision is a balanced approach – stating that half of the Iraqi reconstruction will be grants and half will be loans. This bipartisan provision is designed to protect the American taxpayer. At a time when our national economy is struggling, it is simply not right to be burdening the American taxpayer with 100% of the costs of the reconstruction of Iraq. Iraq is potentially one of the wealthiest nations in the world – with oil wealth estimated at \$7 trillion. Its stream of oil revenues is limited at the moment, but in a few years it will be abundant. That is why it is perfectly appropriate that Iraqis be required to pay back a portion of these reconstruction costs at a later date. The American taxpayer deserves no less.

! America's Veterans Desperately Need The \$1.3 Billion for VA Medical Care. The Obey motion also instructs the conferees to agree to a provision in the Senate-passed bill that provides \$1.3 billion in emergency funding for VA medical care. (This provision was a Bond/Mikulski amendment adopted by the Senate by voice vote on October 17.) Ever since the VA-HUD-Independent Agencies bill passed the House in July, which underfunded VA medical care by \$1.8 billion below what House Republicans had promised in their budget resolution, Democrats have been fighting for this additional \$1.8 billion. The \$1.3 billion in the Bond/Mikulski amendment would take a large step towards meeting that goal. This \$1.3 billion is desperately needed by the VA medical care system. Even before the Iraq war, there was a huge crisis in veterans' medical care: with an average of over 100,000 veterans waiting six months or more for an appointment at VA hospitals. Perhaps even more distressing is the fact that many of them have to wait up to two years to see a doctor. Now this already overburdened VA system is being asked to meet the needs of our wounded soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. At least seven times as many of our soldiers have been wounded in battle as those killed in Iraq. As these wounded service members are discharged from the military, most of them will depend on the VA to meet their needs. If these emergency funds are not included in this bill, the VA will have enormous difficulties in treating these veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan – given the current backlog. In short, without these funds, waiting veterans will have to wait even longer for needed medical care.

! Our Troops Deserve Quality-of-Life Measures. Finally, the Obey motion also instructs conferees to accept two important, Senate-passed quality-of-life measures for our troops – providing medical and dental screening for the National Guard and Reserve prior to mobilization and extending transitional health care benefits for the National Guard and Reserve from 60 days to 180 days following completion of active duty. The level of danger and stress that our troops in Iraq are experiencing every day cannot be overstated. There are, on average, 22 attacks on U.S. soldiers every day in Iraq. The least this Congress can do for these brave men and women in uniform, who are putting their lives at risk for their country every day, is to provide these quality-of-life measures that they deserve.